

# AOC Studies Costs and Benefits of Drug Courts

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In January 2000, the Administrative Office of the Courts' (AOC) Trial Court Programs Division began a study of the state's adult drug courts to answer two policy questions: (1) Are adult drug courts cost-effective? (2) What practices in adult drug courts are most promising and cost-effective?

This summer, researchers are preparing for phase two of the study, set to begin in January 2002, by making preliminary visits to drug courts in Alameda, Monterey, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Francisco, San Diego, Stanislaus, and Yolo Counties. The AOC plans to use these eight sites as testing grounds for the drug court evaluation methodology that is being developed now, in phase one of the study.

## STUDY PROCESS

Due to the size of the study (the state has more than 80 adult drug courts—about a quarter of the drug courts in the nation), limited data, and limited data collection capabilities in each court, the project was designed to have three phases.

In the study's first and current phase (January 2000 through December 2001), the AOC is conducting an in-depth cost-benefit analysis in adult drug courts in Butte, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties. These courts were chosen based on three main criteria: (1) the maturity of their programs, (2) sufficient numbers of graduates for statistical analysis, and (3) the ability to furnish useful information for developing and testing statewide research technology. The cost of the first phase

of the study—approximately \$500,000—is being shared by the AOC and the U.S. Department of Justice's Drug Courts Program Office.

"The biggest challenge to our state's drug courts is the lack of adequate funding," says Superior Court of Butte County Judge Darrell W. Stevens, who chairs the Judicial Council's Collaborative Justice Courts Advisory Committee. "Rightfully so, the Legislature has requested specific documentation that shows that collaborative courts such as drug courts are cost-effective."

"You can't manage what you can't measure," says Jane Pfeifer, Drug Court Program Manager for the Superior Court of Butte County. "Once we have an evaluation method in place, we can increase our ability to allocate resources in a cost-effective manner. We will be able to show that drug courts are not only improving the lives of the participants and society as a whole, but are cost-effective as well."

For the first phase of the study, the AOC is collecting information from the courts; district attorneys' offices; public defenders' offices; treatment providers; and corrections, police, probation, and public health officials. These data will help answer the preliminary policy questions concerning the cost-effectiveness and promising practices of drug courts and will aid in the development of a methodology for conducting a statewide evaluation.

The methodology will be tested in phase two of the study, which will begin in January 2002 and be completed in December 2003. Researchers will draw more concrete conclusions in answer to the two key policy questions.

In the third and final phase, scheduled to begin in January 2004, the AOC will launch a continuous evaluation of all of California's adult drug courts. In addition, the AOC intends to use the evaluation methodology produced by the study as a model for conducting similar cost-benefit analyses of other collaborative justice programs, such as family drug courts, juvenile drug courts, and domestic violence courts.

"One of the major challenges will be the diversity of data housed among the partner agencies involved in drug courts, such as the offices of the district attorney and public defender, as well as different treatment providers," says Jan Dame, Drug Court Coordinator/Special Projects Manager for the Superior Court of San Diego County. "Another test will be to quantify tangible and intangible long-term benefits to the community, such as economic, health, and public safety."

## EVALUATORS

The AOC is conducting the study in conjunction with NPC (Northwest Professional Consortium) Research. NPC Research has completed drug court evaluations across the country and routinely presents evaluation results or methodologies at national drug court conferences. It is notable for being one of the few organizations to use cost-benefit methodologies in evaluations, and its president, Mike Finigan, Ph.D., is an evaluation instructor for the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP).

In addition, the AOC has developed an external research group—composed of AOC staff, Judge Jean Pfeiffer Leonard of the Superior Court of Riverside County, and three additional drug court evaluators—to provide advice on the design of the study and the analysis of data. The additional research group members are with the Rand Corporation, the Urban Institute, and California State University at Long Beach. Like Dr. Finigan, they serve as instructors for the NADCP.

## DADP STUDY

The California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (DADP) is conducting its own

evaluations of the state's drug courts. However, these evaluations, mandated by the state's Drug Court Partnership Act and Comprehensive Drug Court Implementation Act, differ significantly from the AOC's study. The DADP evaluations are focused on treatment-related issues, rather than court system or criminal justice issues, and do not include cost-benefit analyses. The AOC and DADP studies will be complementary, and each agency will share information about methodology and outcome data.

## DRUG COURT EVALUATION AND PROPOSITION 36

Proposition 36, approved by California voters last November, generally mandates substance abuse treatment for nonviolent drug offenders. Expecting a resultant significant increase in the demand for access to drug court programs, the AOC is incorporating the possible effects of Proposition 36 into its drug court study. Because it was important to collect data from the time before July, when the measure took effect, the NPC Research team collected preliminary data from drug court sites that were eligible for phase two while phase one was still in progress. In addition, the AOC's evaluation may serve to help policymakers determine whether ballot or legislative measures such as Proposition 36 are effective means of reducing substance abuse.

● For more information on the drug court study, contact Richard Schauffler, Research and Planning, 415-865-7650; e-mail: richard.schauffler@jud.ca.gov. ■

## Drug Court Month



In Yolo County, Drug Court Month festivities included graduation ceremonies throughout the month of May and a picnic coordinated by the court and the Yolo County Drug Court Task Force. At the picnic, held at Riverwalk Park in West Sacramento, more than 100 drug court participants celebrated their recoveries with their families and friends. Prior to the picnic, the Yolo County Board of Supervisors and the California Assembly presented resolutions in support of Drug Court Month to the Superior Court of Yolo County. Here, Elly Fairclough (left), a representative from the office of Assembly Member Helen Thomson, presented the Assembly's resolution to Judge Doris L. Shockley, who oversees Yolo County's drug court.

## Help Evaluating Drug Courts

The Justice Research Center (JRC) has recently completed the development and distribution of its CD-format *Self-Evaluation Manual and Management Information System (MIS) for Drug Courts*. Developed under the leadership of Janice Roehl, Ph.D., President of JRC, the manual guides drug court practitioners in designing and implementing a basic yet comprehensive evaluation of an adult drug court. The MIS has multiple purposes, including the monitoring of individual participants' progress as they advance through the drug court program.

The intended primary beneficiaries of this project are small drug courts that lack sufficient staff and resources to develop and conduct complex evaluations. The manual provides them with tools for customizing evaluations to suit their needs. Its CD-format database includes caseload summaries and outcome information such as the numbers of graduates and terminations, reasons for terminations, and the number of positive urinalysis tests. The database can also report results on program operations, outcomes, costs, and comparative benefits. The CD can be run on personal computers or on internal networks, but it is not designed to be linked to other databases to retrieve data or exchange information.

JRC is currently developing a similar program for use in juvenile drug courts.

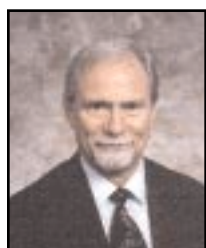
● For further information about the JRC's manual and MIS, contact Janice A. Roehl, President, Justice Research Center, 591 Lighthouse Avenue, Suite 24, Pacific Grove, California 93950, 831-655-1513; e-mail: janroehl@redshift.com.





# Courts Reach Out to Pro Pers

*Conversation With Judge Ronald L. Taylor*



Judge Ronald L. Taylor

*Throughout his entire career, Judge Ronald L. Taylor has been working to improve the court experience for those in need of legal assistance.*

*Just out of the University of California at Davis School of Law in 1971, Judge Taylor received a Reginald Heber Smith National Poverty Law Fellowship. He was assigned to the Merced Legal Services Association, where he worked as a staff attorney until 1973. He then became the director of litigation for Community Legal Services in Riverside and, in 1976, the executive director of Inland Counties Legal Services for Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. As an attorney, he served on the board of directors of the Western Center on Law and Poverty and chaired the California State Bar's Standing Committee on Legal Services to the Poor.*

*Judge Taylor's appointment in January 1983 to the Municipal Court of Riverside County had no effect on his commitment to increasing access for self-represented litigants. He continued to serve the underprivileged as a member of the California Commission on Access to Justice, the Bench/Bar Pro Bono Advisory Committee, and the Legal Services Trust Fund Commission. In 1998, Chief Justice Ronald M. George appointed Judge Taylor to the Judicial Council. He has served on its Executive and Planning Committee ever since.*

*Court News spoke with Judge Taylor about programs available for self-represented litigants and what courts can do to improve services to these individuals.*

**Helping to improve the court experience for self-represented individuals has been a high priority for you throughout your career. Why this focus?**

As a career public servant, I have been committed to making the concept "equal justice for all" a reality. While working as a legal services attorney, I advocated on behalf of poor people in an effort to ensure that they had adequate shelter, food, health care, and education.

As a judicial officer, I have endeavored to make the courts of California more user-friendly and accessible for the communities we serve, increase the level of service we provide, and assist in educating judicial officers and court staff on best practices for handling self-represented litigants.

**This spring you were the planning chair and opening speaker for four regional**

**conferences, sponsored by the Judicial Council's Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC), that focused on helping California's courts assist the growing number of self-represented litigants. How were these conferences developed, and what were their goals?**

In November 1999, the Chief Justice sent a California delegation to the National Conference on Pro Se Litigants, which was held in Scottsdale, Arizona. Its members included judges, court administrators, self-help center directors, family law facilitators, AOC staff, and other professionals in the field. The four regional conferences were conceived as part of the draft state action plan for assisting pro per litigants developed by that delegation, which has become known as "Team California."

We developed ideas that we thought would increase access to the court system in California for self-represented litigants, including replicating the National Conference on Pro Se Litigants here in California on a regional basis. We believed we could begin to address the unmet need we have at the state and county levels if we could replicate the most valuable lessons from the national conference.

The general purpose of the regional conferences was to bring together courts, legal services programs, and community providers to create an oversight organization in each California county. The main focus of the conferences was to assist the courts in developing local action plans for assisting self-represented litigants. The Judicial Council, through the AOC, has allocated \$300,000 in grant funds to the 43 courts that applied for them to develop their own local action plans.

We are developing a section of the Judicial Council's Web site for the CFCC in order to share materials that were developed from the regional conferences. Subjects will include best practices and innovative ideas for the court personnel who will implement these projects. Moreover, we received some excellent recommendations from the courts, which we will pursue. For example, they would like more information for court clerks on the distinction between legal information and legal advice, potential sources of funding for self-help centers, evaluation protocols for self-help centers, and technological means of meeting the needs of pro se litigants.

**What are some of the things trial courts can do to help self-represented litigants with the legal process?**

We are striving to make the courts more user-friendly. Since there is a myriad of steps courts can take to improve their services, I will mention only a few as illustrative. Courthouse signs, maps, and calendars should be professionally produced and prominently displayed so that litigants have clear directions to where they need to be. Information desks staffed by volunteers or employees could also help direct court users. Name tags for employees would help litigants more easily identify persons who can steer them in the right direction. Parking and transit options for courthouse visitors could be improved at some courts. The court could offer copy services, provide restrooms with diaper-changing tables, and encourage court visitors to fill out user surveys. These seemingly simple steps (as examples) can make a big difference.

On a larger scale, many courts have already created family law assistance centers and self-help facilities. If they have not, now is a propitious time to start planning for such a center. Courts and their judges have consistently found that litigants who visit these centers are better informed about the legal process, and courtroom proceedings run more smoothly and efficiently.

In addition, presenters at the National Conference on Pro Se Litigants suggested that courts provide forms translated into Spanish and other languages, checklists and instruction packets on court procedures, training for court staff on dealing with pro per litigants, additional court interpreters, touch-screen information kiosks, and Internet access. They offered many ideas at the institutional level, such as simplifying legalese, eliminating or altering the rules of evidence for cases involving self-represented litigants, having the judicial officer explain the court process at the beginning of the case, and furthering the use of alternative dispute resolution.

**You are a current member of the California Commission on Access to Justice and the Bench/Bar Pro Bono Advisory Committee. What are the goals of these organizations? How are they helping to provide assistance for court users?**

The original goals of the Bench/Bar Pro Bono Advisory Commit-

tee were to educate the bar and the judiciary about the crisis in legal services funding, develop proposals to deal with increasing numbers of pro per litigants, address the ways the judiciary can encourage pro bono work by attorneys, and study other models for systemic changes to streamline the processing of legal services cases. The Bench/Bar Pro Bono Advisory Committee merged with the California Commission on Access to Justice in 2000.

The primary task of the Commission on Access to Justice is to address the needs of poor, nearly poor, and moderate-income litigants in California by providing ongoing leadership, overseeing efforts to increase funding, and improving methods of delivery to these individuals. A good example of the commission's actions toward these goals was their primary role in the creation of the Equal Access Fund, which routes state moneys to support legal services programs. This was very important because, prior to the creation of this fund, California was one of the few states that had not provided General Fund moneys to support legal services projects. The Equal Access Fund is currently \$10 million, but we [the Commission on Access to Justice] are working to increase the level of funding in the future.

Most of the Equal Access Fund money is distributed directly to legal services programs. One million dollars, however, was set aside to create partnership grants. This creative initiative is intended to bring courts together with legal services programs to find new ways to provide services to low- and moderate-income litigants. We started out with 12 and now have 15 partnership grant programs. For example, Riverside County instituted a program at its family law court that provides legal services to monolingual Spanish-speaking family law litigants.

In most partnership grant programs around the state, experienced legal service attorneys are actually working in the courthouse. This helps foster a high level of collaboration between the court system and legal service providers, which will ultimately benefit court users.

**Chief Justice George recently appointed the members of the Task Force on Self-Represented Litigants. Any advice for the new members?**

My advice would be to provide leadership and assistance in each county on the development and implementation of the local action plans for assisting self-represented litigants. Network with legal services programs and those organizations that assist self-represented litigants on statewide and local levels. Refine and implement the statewide draft action plan developed by Team California. And, most importantly, remember to enjoy the tasks you are about to undertake! This is a unique oppor-

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